

**St. Mary Rehabilitation Working Group Meeting
10:00 – 3:00 February 22, 2006
Triangle Telephone Meeting Room – Havre, Montana**

Welcome and Introductions:

Members Present: Lt. Governor John Bohlinger, Randy Reed, Marko Manoukian, Dave Peterson, Randy Perez, Kevin Salsbery, Dolores Plumage, Paul Tuss, Gary Anderson, Michael DesRosier, Max Maddox, John Lacey, Steve Page, Jim Rector, Mike Barthel, Pat Thomas, Matt McCann, Judy Edwards (MT Consensus Council) Larry Mires (Exec. Director) Brandi Beecher (Exec. Assistant)

Information included in meeting handouts:

- Agenda
- Draft February 15, 2006 SMWG Authorization Committee Meeting Notes
- Draft January 25, 2006 SMWG Meeting Notes
- Draft St. Mary Authorization on St. Mary Water Supply/Milk River Project
- Draft St. Mary Authorization on St. Mary Storage Project/Milk River Project (Pick-Sloan)
- St. Mary Working Group Income Statement & Accounting Statement
- Montana Consensus Council Evaluations & Participant Satisfaction Scorecard

Review and approve meeting agenda:

- Meeting agenda approved.

Review and approve January 25 meeting notes:

- Reviewed January 25, 2006 meeting notes and group approved by consensus.
- Dave P. added his name to the attendance list from the February 15 Authorization Committee meeting notes.

Update on Meeting with USBR

- John Tubbs gave report on meeting with Mike Ryan of USBR in Billings. Meeting included discussion on the white paper drafted by USBR and submitted to US Senator Conrad Burns and USBR Commissioner Keys. USBR indicated the Bureau of Reclamation can not take a leadership role in authorizing the rehabilitation of the St. Mary/Milk River System.
- Larry Mires added that USBR indicated if Congress mandates the rehabilitation, USBR will complete the rehabilitation.

Update on meeting with Montana Electric Cooperatives Association

- Larry Mires reported MECA supported the rehabilitation of the St. Mary/Milk River System, but did not commit to supporting Pick-Sloan Authorization for the Milk River basin.
- Mires felt MECA was receptive to the idea, and the communications are ongoing.
- John Tubbs suggested focusing effort on the non-Pick-Sloan version of Congressional Authorization, because SMWG has not received full support from the Electric Cooperative Association.

Review of Project Authorization Sub-Committee Meeting

- Mike Dailey reported focus of the Authorization Sub-Committee meeting held in Malta was to make sure irrigators were comfortable with draft Authorization language. Attendees reviewed draft authorization and made changes.

Review of Project Authorization

- Judy Edwards of the Montana Consensus Council moderated extensive discussion on the non-Pick-Sloan draft authorization language. Each SMRWG member was given two minutes to discuss concerns with draft authorization language. Major concerns included the potential cost share required for the rehabilitation, priority of rehabilitating the St. Mary Diversion works, environmental concerns and Blackfeet Tribal land and water rights.
- John Tubbs and Anne Yates with DNRC talked about concerns that State of Montana has with the draft Authorization language.
- After extensive discussion, SMRWG tasked John Tubbs, Kent Heidt and Anne Yates to rewrite Authorization language using the input from the discussion of the group.
- SMRWG will meet via conference call to discuss draft authorization revised by DNRC on March 2 at 1:30 p.m.

Executive Director's Report

- Larry Mires reported a survey on aging infrastructure has been distributed to Milk River irrigation districts. Districts need to return completed survey to Larry or Mike Dailey.
- Larry gave an overview of the conference's he has attended during the past few months. Felt this has raised the national interest and knowledge of the St. Mary/Milk River rehabilitation efforts.
- Larry reported next Family Farm Alliance conference will be held March 1-3 in Las Vegas. Larry and Kent Heidt will attend. SMWG approved sending Max Maddox as well.
- Larry M. reported he will travel to Washington D.C. March 6-9 with Randy Reed and John Tubbs to deliver draft authorization language to US Senator Burns's office and meet with Montana's Congressional Delegation as well as USBR and several other parties.
- Larry reported the National Water User's Conference is scheduled for April 3-6 and suggested several SMWG members should attend. SMWG approved by consensus to send a total of six individuals, Steve Page, Randy Reed, Gary Anderson, and Larry M. as well as cost share with the Blackfeet and Fort Belknap Tribes to send representation. Cost share consists of SMWG paying for conference registration fees and Blackfeet and Fort Belknap Tribes will pay for travel and lodging expenses.
- Larry reported an application was submitted for the Water in the West Grant for \$25,000 to develop an educational video that may be used to educate the public on the St. Mary/Milk River system and rehabilitation efforts. The grant award is expected to be announced in April.

Updates for Congressional Delegation

- US Senator Conrad Burns joined meeting via telephone. He emphasized he understands the importance of the St. Mary/Milk River system and will continue work closely with the SMWG to move authorization language forward. John L. asked if the SMWG draft authorization should be generic. US Senator Burns suggested the language that is developed by the SMWG should be generic because it will be revised by the Senator's legal staff.
- US Senator Burns' representative Sarah Converse suggested since the St. Mary/Milk River Project is such a large project, the draft legislation must be generic and broad scope, so the Congressional staff can make changes. Sara C. also reported that Senator Burns has been meeting with USBR Commissioner Keyes regularly on the issue.
- US Representative Denny Rehberg's Representative Seth Broesder introduced himself to the SMWG. He is the new field representative out of Rehberg's Great Falls field office and will be the point of contact for the SMWG.

Financial Report

- Paul Tuss gave an update on the SMWG Financial report.

St. Mary Operation Report

- Ed Hedlund of BOR reported getting ready for the 2006 water season. Snow pack is 94% of normal. Lake Sherburne is at 45,500 acre feet and 207% of normal storage. Fresno Reservoir is at 49,200 acre feet of water and 138 % of normal. Nelson is at 34,200 acre feet and at 97% of normal storage.

Summary of Agreements

- SMRWG approved meeting notes from January 25 meeting held in Cut Bank.
- SMRWG approved sending Max Maddox to the Family Farm Alliance meeting in Las Vegas March 2-3.
- SMRWG approved sending six individuals to the National Water Resources Association conference in Washington D.C. April 3-6. SMRWG will pay expenses for Larry M., Gary A., Steve P. and Randy R. to attend and will pay cost of registration fees for Fort Belknap and Blackfeet Tribal representatives to attend.

Summary of Action Items

- Each irrigation district needs to complete a survey on aging infrastructure. Completed surveys should to be sent to Mike Dailey or Larry Mires.
- SMRWG will make comments to John Tubbs on the draft authorization language by Friday, February 24.
- Jeanne Whiteing and Randy Perez will supply definitions of the Fort Belknap and Blackfeet Tribes for the draft authorization to John Tubbs.
- Jeanne Whiteing will assist with drafting a section for the draft authorization to protect the Blackfeet Tribe's land and water rights.

Approved Meeting Notes

- Anne Yates, John Tubbs and Kent Heidt will rewrite draft Authorization language using input from SMRWG meeting discussion. Revised draft Authorization will be distributed to SMRWG by Tuesday, February 28.
- SMRWG will review revised Authorization by conference call on March 2 at 1:30 p.m.
- SMRWG and Alternates need to submit any new contact information or changes to Larry or Brandi.

Next Meetings

- March 2, 1:30 p.m. Conference Call to discuss draft Authorization language.
- March 22 in Chinook.